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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 002138

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SOLE IJAW GOVERNOR DOWNPLAYS GON TALKS
WITH DELTA MILITANTS, CALLS FOR "SINCERE" NATIONAL
CONFERENCE

REF: LAGOS 2134

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne per 1.4 b and d

1. (C) Summary: In an October 14 meeting with the Consul General and Pol/Econ chief, Bayelsa State Governor Alamieyeseigha, Nigeria's only Ijaw governor, downplayed the import of talks between the GON and Ijaw Delta militant leaders Dokubo Asari and Ateke Tom. Clearly seeing Asari as an usurper who could encroach on his position in the Ijaw leadership condominium, Alamieyeseigha dismissed Asari as a "CNN creation." He maintained that a national conference was required to address fundamental problems plaguing the Delta region and Nigeria as a whole. However, Alamieyeseigha held out little hope that the GON would convene earnestly such a conference. End Summary.

Ijaw Grievances Are Real, But Asari Is A Fraud

2. (C) Bayelsa State governor D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha is the lone Ijaw governor in the Niger Delta region. Ijaws claim to be Nigeria's fourth largest ethnic group and to comprise a majority of inhabitants of the oil-rich Delta region. Asked about recent talks between militant leader Dokubo Asari and the GON, Alamieyeseigha responded that Asari was a "CNN creation" who had been given a world stage by a single journalist, i.e. CNN's Jeff Koinange, whose reputation in Nigeria could use some varnish. "Asari is a nothing who at the last minute decided to use the Ijaw cause," the governor averred, in an implicit reference to Asari's recent past as political hireling of Rivers State Governor Peter Odili. The governor heaped blame on Odili for "arming those boys" during the 2003 elections and sharply criticized Odili for "not exercising the leadership" to disarm Asari and others once the elections were over. Alamieyeseigha dismissed the notion that Asari now might be too much for Odili to handle, noting that he (Alamieyeseigha) had summoned Asari for talks and had no difficulty in getting Asari to come and see him. "If Odili wanted to stop this, he could," Alamieyeseigha concluded.

3. (C) Alamieyeseigha predicted that "nothing much" would emerge from the GON-Asari talks. The GON does not have the political will to bring meaningful change to the Delta or for the Ijaws. Meanwhile, no matter how much noise Asari makes, he has not been cloaked with the raiment of Ijaw leadership. He is not authorized to cut a deal on behalf of the group.

4. (SBU) The governor told us the problems of the Ijaw and Delta are well-known. Oil is the Nigerian lifeline. Yet the Delta which bears the brunt of oil-related environmental degradation has no control over oil resources and has not benefited from the tremendous revenues that revert to the GON. Speaking more like an Ijaw activist than the chief magistrate of a multi-ethnic state, the governor maintained that Ijaws were insufficiently integrated into the central government power-structure and decision-making apparatus. While Ijaws represent the fourth largest ethnic group, they have always been woefully underrepresented in national offices, ministerial appointments and as recipients of the concomitant patronage that flows from occupying these offices. Buttressing his points, he remarked that there is no electricity in Bayelsa state. He further claimed that no Ijaw had been in a visible position of power at the federal level since 1979 when Joseph Wayas held the senate presidency.

National Conference Needed, But GON Not Sincere

5. (C) To achieve long-term stability, Alamieyeseigha maintained that Nigeria needs political restructuring -- more federalism, less central government. The Delta peoples require greater decision-making participation and increased resource control. Delta residents, he said, should be strategic partners with the oil companies and with the federal government. On the national level, Alamieyeseigha said the federal government should engage in increased and

better consultation with the states. There should also be greater minority political participation.

16. (C) Alamieyeseigha said in his view a national conference would be the best vehicle for advancing these issues and addressing fundamental problems plaguing Nigeria as a whole, and the Delta region in particular. The desired outcome would be a downsized federal government, increased independence at the state level, and greater resource control for Delta peoples. He stressed the indivisibility of Nigeria and said change should come through dialogue, not arms.

17. (C) Alamieyeseigha had scant confidence the GON would convene such a conference. He said that President Obasanjo was not seriously contemplating a conference. Moreover, he felt that Obasanjo did not really believe in dialogue or in listening to opposing viewpoints. For Obasanjo, dialogue as a mere stalling tactic -- engage the opponent in talks so that you might weaken his activism. He noted that "Delta stakeholders" had been meeting with the President for years, with no tangible results. Alamieyeseigha concluded that even if the GON convened a national conference, it would freight it with endless committees and reports, resulting in few substantive changes.

Comment

18. (C) Although an elected governor, Alamieyeseigha spoke almost exclusively from his Ijaw heart. What he sees as Ijaw political and economic deprivation clearly rankles him. However, while Alamieyeseigha wants greater resource control for Ijaws, he is not prepared to countenance upstart Ijaw militants who seek to supplant his leadership role as the most important Ijaw office holder. While he castigated Asari, Asari is ironically the governor's ally. Asari's antics have embarrassed and undermined the national office aspirations of Rivers State Governor Odili. Alamieyeseigha wants the South-South to produce the 2007 PDP vice-presidential candidate, but Odili is not who he has in mind. Given the importance of the Ijaw, he thinks the person to be elevated to that position should be Nigeria's lone Ijaw governor -- himself.

BROWNE